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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000586

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/11/2017  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [AEMR](#) [ELBA](#) [SMIG](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: TROPICAL CYCLONE GONU CAUSES SEVERE HARDSHIP FOR  
LOW-SKILLED EXPATRIATE WORKERS

REF: A. MUSCAT 576

[1](#)B. 06 MUSCAT 1635  
[1](#)C. MUSCAT 388

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Low-skilled expatriate workers - particularly those residing in employer-owned compounds locally known as "labor camps" - were severely affected by tropical cyclone Gonu and continue to face food and water shortages. The number of storm-related fatalities among these workers remains unconfirmed. Foreign missions are beginning to distribute aid to their nationals, but assistance so far has been limited and is hampered by poor information regarding the condition and location of affected populations. The Embassy is monitoring conditions in the camps and updating relevant foreign missions as needed. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) As Oman continues to assess the scope of damage caused by tropical cyclone Gonu (ref A), it appears that low-skilled expatriate laborers and domestic workers may have been severely and disproportionately affected. Unconfirmed estimates of the number of expatriate workers who may have died during the storm continue to rise. Sources reported that as of June 8, the bodies of as many as 40 Indian workers had been found throughout the capital area. (Note: As of 0900 local time, June 11, the toll of fatalities from Gonu is 49 according to official Omani sources, with 27 missing. End note.) One Indian woman living in a mixed-nationality, low-income neighborhood 60 kilometers outside Muscat reported that a wall of water surged through her community at night when many people were sleeping, and that she heard of some individuals being carried away by the rushing water. Contacts expect the number of expatriate dead to rise further as more information comes in from communities around Muscat and further along the coast, and as water and mud are removed from the worst affected areas.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Many labor camps, in which thousands of expatriate laborers live throughout the capital area, suffered extensive damage. Several camps in the Wadi Adai area close to Muscat were wiped out by rushing water, which surged through the wadi ("valley" in Arabic) from the surrounding mountains. Omani-based Indian news sources reported that at least 18 workers from Wadi Adai were listed as missing following the storm, and are presumed dead. The cleaning company OIG, which maintained a compound in Wadi Adai, moved 200 of its workers from the demolished camp to Oman's Bowshar Stadium for temporary lodging, where they were staying as of June 9 without cover or air conditioning. Kalhat, another cleaning company that had a facility in Wadi Adai, relocated a similar number of workers to its camp in the Ghala industrial area,

bringing the total number of workers housed in the already overcrowded camp to more than 800 (ref B).

¶4. (SBU) Workers living in the Ghala camps, many of which also were damaged by the storm and associated flooding, reported food and water shortages since Gonu hit June 6. Some of the laborers in Kalhat's Ghala facility told poloff on June 8 that they had no water for drinking or cooking after the storm, and blamed the company for its slow response in addressing their needs. Approximately 150 of the camp's residents gathered in front of the supervisor's building on the evening of June 7 angrily demanding food and water. Contacts added that workers throughout the Ghala camps faced similar conditions, and that there were reports on June 7 of some violence among workers in at least one facility. While poloff confirmed that Kalhat sent water trucks to its camp on the evening of June 8 and again on June 9, workers contend that the water is not nearly enough to meet demand.

¶5. (C) Diplomats and labor attaches in embassies of labor-exporting countries admit that they still do not know how many of their nationals have been severely impacted by Gonu, particularly among the population of workers who may be here illegally. Labor attaches in the Sri Lankan Embassy say that they have little information on the condition or whereabouts of women living and working illegally in Oman as domestic employees under what is locally called the "free visa system," but suspect that they are facing considerable hardship. Poloff traveled with the attaches to a devastated neighborhood outside of Muscat to deliver emergency assistance to a number of Sri Lankan nationals who said they lost everything in the storm. One woman stated that a group of illegal workers similarly affected by the storm were scared to leave their rented villa and accept aid - even from their own embassy - for fear of being deported.

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¶6. (SBU) Foreign missions claim that they are aware of the overall situation of their nationals, but most are only beginning to mobilize relief efforts. The Indian community is the most organized so far, using a network of private businessmen to manage and fund emergency aid distribution. The Indian School in a suburb of Muscat is acting as a primary distribution point, and volunteers at the site report that they served over 2,000 people of all nationalities with food and water between June 7-9. Contacts assert, however, that demand for assistance is greater than supply. The Indian director of the Tijan Group of Companies, who is coordinating cyclone relief in Ghala, stated that he is simply engaging in "triage," focusing on the thousands of workers in smaller companies who likely are at greater risk of extended food and water shortages.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Post will continue attempting to monitor the condition of expatriate workers and inform relevant foreign missions of situations in which their nationals may be at considerable risk. Post also is prepared to engage companies like Kalhat, with which the Embassy has a contract to clean the Chancery (ref C), to ensure that it is taking steps to meet the basic needs of its workers, given city-wide disruptions to water supply. Mission employees have donated food and water to workers in the camps, and will continue these volunteer efforts. End comment.  
GRAPPO